Occupation, Dignity, and Space: The Rise of Dalit Studies

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> "Friends, such was the *vasti* (neighborhood]. Here I came into being and grew, from small to big. This community gave me food and gave me the store of experience with which I have made my life's journey. I can never refrain from taking a *darshan* […..] of the *vasti*….The sweet tonic of that community's public activities fed me, nourished the life of social consciousness."
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> Vasant Moon, *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*, p. 175.[1]

> "Our *basti* was similar to the other *bastis'* [neighborhoods] of the city. The *basti* was known as Chamar Gate but later came to be known as Chamar *Darwaza* [Entrance]. People generally called our *basti* Chamar *Darwaza*. After the spread of education [consciousness] we started calling it Jatav Gate. Some people still call it as *Chamaroin ka Moholla* [neighbhorhood]. Even now rickshaw and tonga drivers, seeking *savari* [customers], can be seen and heard loudly shouting Chamar Darwaza."
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> Mohan Dass Namishray, *Apne-Apne Pinjare: Ek Dalit ki Atamakatha* (*Prisoners of Oneself: Autobiography of a Dalit*), p.17.[2]

The experience of growing up untouchable in the *vasti* or *basti* (*jati mohalla*) was crucial to the formation of Dalit consciousness among leading Dalit activists and writers of modern India.[3] The two authors with which this article opens capture this essential element of their experience in their titles. In Vasant Moon's case, his original Marathi title is *Vasti*. Moon's autobiography tells the story of Maharpura (the Mahar neighborhood) in the Sitabardi area of Nagpur city in western India, whose Mahar residents nurtured a proud social space where Dalit children acquired education and social consciousness. Moon's title *Vasti* captures a focal point of his sentiments which is lost in the English translation of the title—a celebration of Maharpura. Its residents expressed their lively sentiments through participation in education, sports, politics, and cultural events in the 1930s and the 1940s. "In the community existed a passion for sports," writes Moon. Wrestling, *hututu* (or *Kabaddi*), *khokho*, football, hockey, and cricket were all patronized by the community sports club. In addition to the changing cultural and political practices, Moon's thick description of several sporting events, including a chapter on the *hututu* or *kabaddi* tournament in 1939, underscores the role of sports in capturing Maharpura's pride. In contrast, Namishray's colloquial narrative captures his every day experience of growing up in the Chamar *mohalla* of Meerut city in North India, outlining a grim tale of deprivation, exclusion, and abuse faced by his community. Yet the annual celebration of the Ravi Dass *yatra* (parade) in the 1950s, along with electoral politics, provided Dalit neighborhoods in the city a sense of communal solidarity experienced through public events. According to Namishray, those who inhabit the city of Meerut and his ancestral village outside the city live in *jati mohallas* and this collective experience shapes and mediates their consciousness. It is the *jati mohallas* that he characterizes as *Apne-Apne Pinjare*—the spatially marked prisons of caste identity. Though their narratives emphasize contrasting themes of celebration and deprivation, both of these authors locate their experience of caste in the spatial markings that define their neighborhoods.

The constitutive role of space in Dalit consciousness, struggle, and political mobilization has received comparatively little academic attention, particularly in comparison with the two more prominent themes that have shaped the study of Dalit society and history, namely the association with impure occupations and the question of dignity.

Underscoring the spatial character of *jati mohallas*, and Dalits lived experiences, helps us to recognize these spaces as crucial to an understanding of South Asian society and history. Namishray and Moon are not alone in highlighting the formative experience of *jati mohallas*, *vastis*, and *bastis*, (local caste neighborhoods) through which Dalit *jati chetna* (consciousness) is produced. Such a perspective also enables us to understand and contextualize the recent debates and controversy around the use of caste in the 2011 Indian census. The category of caste is back in Indian census after a gap of eighty years, from 1931 to 2011.[4] Advocates who fought to bring caste back into the census frequently invoked the "everyday experience" of those living in *jati mohallas* in towns and villages, in sharp contrast to the opinions shared by those living in urban English-speaking caste Hindu neighborhoods where caste is less obviously marked. In arguing against the reintroduction of caste into the Indian census, many caste Hindus have claimed that such a move would reinscribe caste within spaces that they imply have become caste-free. K. Satyanarayana is one of a number of scholars who have shown that it is "everyday experience" that has shaped "the literary and activist writings and academic scholarship of Dalits" in ways that "underscore the view that caste is a source of everyday discrimination, brutal forms of violence, dehumanization, and inequality."[5] The reference to everyday experience of living in *jati mohallas*, both in villages and in towns, belies any notion of being "caste-free."

Impure occupation and quest for dignity are the two most well-known, and most dominant, conceptual models through which the history of the caste and untouchability has been examined in South Asia. The Hindu ritual binary of purity and pollution, sanctioned by the Hindu *Shastras* and associated with a hierarchy of impure occupations, has been the most visible form of examining the lives of Dalit communities. This binary was transformed into administrative and ethnographic analytic categories by the colonial state, and also informed the writings of anthropologists in the twentieth century. Dalit and lower caste activists and writers, as well as a number of non-Dalit writers, have challenged the purity-impurity binary by emphasizing the initiatives taken by the Dalits to achieve dignity, which offers a second framework for contemporary and historical analyses of caste. These efforts have challenged the occupational frameworks for thinking about caste and community, and have offered important new ways for projecting identity and rethinking Indian history.

The Occupational Modality

In the nineteenth century identifying Dalit *jatis* with an occupation was central to understanding their position, status, and history in South Asian societies. This mode of investigation was particularly central to the study of Dalits in colonial India. Almost each and every Dalit *jati* came to be associated with what was increasingly considered their traditional and ritually impure occupation to account for their untouchability. Such an understanding of South Asian society was no doubt drawn from Brahmanical textual sources like *Manusmiriti*, as so many writers have attested from the 1970s onwards.[6] The colonial officials and ethnographers systematically conceptualized the occupational perspective through the census survey volumes and the caste and tribe series from the late-nineteenth century. The census classificatory tables with Brahmans on the top and Dalits on the bottom visualized a sociologically "perfect fit" which was both ideological and hierarchical between the Hindu and the British imagination of

Indian society. The Chamars, Chuhras, and Pasi in North India, Chandals (Namashudras) in Bengal, Mahars and Chambars in Western India, Malas, Madigas, or Paraiyars communities in southern India were all associated with one occupation which was considered as their traditional and original occupation. The Indian censuses of 1901 and 1911 and the provincial caste and tribe volumes narrated "myths of origin" of Dalit *jatis'* to explain their ritually impure status to a polluting marital alliances between two different caste groups. Such explanations were based on the Brahmanical sources and reinforced by local caste-Hindu elites.[7] George W. Briggs classic 1920 book, *The Chamars*, is based primarily on the census, caste and tribe volumes, and gazetteers.[8] Building on this assumption was the colonial efforts to find a role for Dalit *jatis* in the industries that would fit with their impure occupations. In particular the provincial monographs published in the first decade of the twentieth century identified Dalits as appropriate workers in the leather industry because of their polluting status.[9] Because of these notions, Dalits were employed in the sanitary departments of urban municipalities in India, the leather industries, and mill hands in the textile production.[10] The Hindu textual understanding of the caste system and untouchability and the *varna* classification of Indian society in the census complemented and reinforced a secular structure.

Forming a crucial body of colonial sociology, the provincial caste and tribe survey volumes published between the 1890s and 1930s have played an influential role in shaping the study of Dalit society and history.[11] These volumes were based on minimal or no field work, although many writers had personal experiences, drawn primarily from other reports like the district gazetteer and census volumes. In addition to discussing the Dalit *jatis'* origin myths and different *jatis'* current and historical occupational locations, they addressed a key question about Dalit society's relationship with the Hindu society (and Hinduism). The writers of these monographs emphasized the Dalit religious (and social) world that consisted of local gram *devatas* (gods) and animistic beliefs around magic, spirits and ghosts, which made them very different from Hinduism. In addition, they identified Dalit *jatis'* religious saints and sect with great detail, like Ravidas (Raidas) in northern India, Chokhamela in western India, and Nandanar in the Tamil region. William Crooke's discussion of Chamars and Pasis in the northern India, Edgar Thurston & K. R. Rangachari's discussion of Madigas, Malas, and Paraiyans or Paraiahs in the southern India, reaffirm an autonomous organization of Dalit social and cultural practices.[12] By focusing on the non-Brahmanical religious practices and Dalit *jatis'* autonomous religious traditions, these ethnographic accounts had anticipated the focus of postcolonial anthropologists.

The textual model of studying untouchability was seriously challenged by new anthropological studies from the 1960s that were based on extensive ethnographic field work and motivated by an explicit desire to capture Dalit subjects' ideological positions relating to religious, cultural, and social practices of exclusion and subordination. To be sure, the occupational modality remained central to these studies but they posed two key questions: i) do the untouchables accept the Hindu (*varna*) ideology of purity and pollution, and ii) do the untouchables have discrete religious and social practices compared to the Hindu society. There was also a distinct political context in the 1960s, a visible but regionally confined Dalit movement in Maharashtra and to some extent in Uttar Pradesh. In this context, the hierarchical divisions within the Dalit society were increasingly viewed as barriers to successful all-India political mobilization.[13]

Kathleen Gough, Gerald Berreman, and Joan Mencher underscored, with solid research and great detail, Dalit *jatis'* distinctive social and cultural beliefs which were explicitly

contrasted with the Brahmanical values. Gough's study of Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas, (untouchable groups belonging to Paraiyans and Pallans) in the two villages of the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, highlighted the latters' "differences in the range of the kinship system as whole."[14] In terms of religion, the Adi-Dravidas worshipped the deities that "control the growth or failure of crops and infliction or removal of sickness, whereas the great deities favored by the Brahmans are concerned with more abstract problems relating to the expiration of sins and the accumulation of religious merit."[15] Gerald Berreman's insightful analysis of the *Hindus of the Himalayas* paid particular attention to the Doms refusal to accept their status as untouchables. Berreman couldn't find a single Dom who accepted the dominant groups' explanation of their untouchability. Berreman argues that the ritually impure status of the Doms is generally explained, "in terms of mythology which takes away some of the sting of the negative associations of low status, usually by providing respectable ancestry for the caste and explaining its decline in terms of unfortunate circumstances."[16] In addition to these ideological and cultural differences, Joan Mencher's essay drew attention to the role of Dalit labor in the agricultural production of the wheat and rice in the Indo-Gangetic plains and the coastal belts of south India. Attentive to the social and cultural location of the Dalit *jatis* (Paraiyans, Pallans, and Chakkilis), Mencher argued that they have little patience for Hindu notions of *dharma* and *karma* and therefore it is analytically important to "distinguish between the overt acceptance of such values and the holding of other values usually unexpressed to outsiders."[17] To illustrate this point, Mencher, an American anthropologist, brought an uncanny sensitivity to the discussion of the practices of beef eating and the caste Hindu stereotypes about carrion that is cited as the reason for their impure status. On the basis of her data in Tamil Nadu, Mencher argues that Paraiyans "never ate beef from animals that had died of disease" but only "from those that had died of old age or by accident, and that even such beef accounted for only a small part of the beef eaten."[18] Drawing from a diversity of sources and paying attention to a range of practices, these three anthropologists, along with others, outlined in a powerful way Dalit *jatis'* deep skepticism with the caste Hindu accounts of untouchability.

Making substantive intervention in the existing anthropological assumption on the subject, Michael Moffatt's 1979 study, *An Untouchable Community of South India*, drew attention to the persistence of hierarchy in Indian society, especially among the Dalit *jatis*, through his study of five untouchable communities in the Endavur village in the Chingleput district in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.[19] He argues that Dalits have consciously recreated the hierarchical caste system within their own *ceris'* through their inclusion and exclusion of the social and cultural practices of the Hindu society in the *uur* village. Thus, when they perform duties and roles in the *uur* village they recreate their assigned role through consensual participation in the agricultural and religious calendar. Within their *ceri*, they have "replicated" the hierarchical order of *uur*, in which Paraiyars occupy the dominant role and other smaller untouchable *jatis* perform various impure ritual tasks. These rituals relate to the marriage, birth, and death ceremonies, the clothes washer, the removal of dead animals, and leather work. Moffatt fundamentally disagreed with the dominant notion that the Dalits constitute a separate society or that they don't accept the *varna* ideology, but his framework didn't gain much traction among South Asian scholars. In his study of Paraiyars in the village Valghira Manickam, in the close proximity of the rural town Devakottai in Ramnad district in the south east Tamil Nadu, Robert Deliége argues that they "are not divided into hierarchized sub-castes" and they "fiercely defended" practices of equality within the community and among the untouchables.[20] After reading the first four chapters of the book one is left wondering whether the Paraiyars

commitment to ideas of equality is an innate and archaic characteristic of the community or is it a product of their independent economic life made possible due to a range of occupations like the popular brick-making, work in the shops and restaurants. It also ensured that Paraiyars were not dependent on the dominant castes or their *uur* (village). The conditions of Dalit residents of Valghira Manickam may be vastly different from their fellow counterparts in the Endavur village studied by Moffatt who are far more dependent, and integrated, with the lives of dominant castes.

As the following studies demonstrate, an emphasis on Dalit initiatives to challenge practices of domination received new impetus through an investigation into Chamar activism in Agra and Lucknow. Owen Lynch's 1969 study of Jatav Chamars of Agra was based on solid ethnography and offered a detailed account of their activism and their tenacious capacity to carve out social and political choices available to them. His study demonstrated that the Jatavs, despite their involvement in different political settings and despite actors like the right wing Bharatiya Jana Sangh or the mainstream Congress party, had evolved a remarkable commitment to Ambedkar who had emerged as powerful leader by the 1940s in North India.[21] Building on this new focus, R. S. Khare's 1984 study drew attention for the first time to English language academia to a Chamar ascetic Swami Achutanand and his disciple advocate Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, a caste Hindu household reformer, and their body of writings and activism in the north Indian society. By situating them within the Indic ascetic tradition, Khare discusses the Dalit activists' critique of the *varna* hierarchy which is traced to the pre-Aryan historical time, the Indus civilization, and to an alternative "Indian spiritual idealism" represented by Saint Ravidas.[22]

As a discipline, the anthropologists paid particular attention to the study of Dalit society and history. Thematically, one can discern continuity between the colonial and the postcolonial anthropologists in examining the relationship between Dalit and Hindu society, except for one fundamental difference. Unlike the colonial ethnologists, the latter's work was based on intensive field work in the villages. The postcolonial anthropologists drew attention to the "autonomous self" of Dalits' social and cultural practices in villages and their ideological and political agendas. In this respect, there was a greater recognition to uncover and examine ideological sources of Dalit lives, especially the Sant tradition that has thrived in the Dalit neighborhoods. By the 1990s historians joined in this search to discover Dalits as historical actors who articulated a critique of hierarchy in South Asia.

The Dignity Modality

The Flaming Feet (1993 & 2010) by D.R. Nagaraj is a classic work that offers an original and insightful conceptual framework to understand the history and practice of Dalit movement and the study of caste in India.[23] In the history of Dalit movements Nagaraj identifies three moments, i) the proto-Dalit activism (1910-1930), ii) the emergence and consolidation of Ambedkarite paradigm (1933-1972), iii) the emergence of the Dalit Panthers movement in Maharashtra (1972). Underpinning Nagaraj's typology of the Dalit movement is the question of dignity, the birth of Dalit subject to create an alternative memory and cultural practices. In the last two hundred years generations of Dalit activists and publicists, including caste-Hindu reformers, actively articulated a range of positions and possibilities to claim dignity for ordinary Indians. This long history of struggle and activism of Dalits became visible to the academic world after the 1990s with new historical research into their past. This was also motivated to understand the historical origins of contemporary Dalit movement and its' astounding political and electoral success in North India.

Because of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's legacy and the strength of the Dalit movement in western India, Maharashtra attracted scholarly attention in the 1960s and 1970s. Eleanor Zelliot, Gail Omvedt, and Rosalind O'Hanlon offered us a rich and nuanced history of the Dalit movement in the region.[24] Zelliot's numerous essays published from the 1969 onward drew the attention of the academic world and for the first time to the history of the Mahar and Ambedkar's movement. Zelliot situated the rise of Ambedkar within the Mahar movement in the late-nineteenth century that had begun to actively challenge the Brahmans' domination of ritual and secular power. This was made possible because sections of Mahar community had entered new professions by joining the army, and becoming contractors, moneylenders, and primary school teachers. The arrival of Gandhi and Ambedkar in the 1920s offered the Mahars, other Dalit groups, and the caste Hindus two different visions of equality. Gandhi's "ideal "Bhangi" (scavenger) would continue to do sanitation work even though his status would equal that of Brahman," but "for Ambedkar equality meant not equal status of the varnas, but equal social, political, and economic opportunity for all." Ambedkar emphasized the use "of modern methods based on education and the exercise of legal and political rights."[25]

Gail Omvedt (1976) and Rosalind O'Hanlon (1985) outlined the emergence of a formidable ritual and secular critique of Brahman power in nineteenth century western India.[26] The critique was outlined by individuals belonging to Shudra communities consisting of Maratha and other low caste cultivating castes. O'Hanlon located Phule's ideological agenda to a context shaped by the missionary activities with access to modern education and the circulation of ideas relating to human equality as the basis of political power. This included the influence of Thomas Paine's writings. Phule outlined an ideological agenda for political and cultural consolidation of non-Brahman groups by articulating a Kshatriya identity for shudra and ati-shudra (untouchable) communities, by making access to education a key objective to the communities' success, by challenging Brahmanical access and control of religious texts, by opening schools and forming societies for these social groups, and by writing tracts and books to propagate these ideas.[27] Zelliot, Omvedt, and O'Hanlon's work effectively intervened in the South Asian historiography's exclusive focus on the nationalist ideology in resolving the question of power in colonial India and opened the question of domination within Indian society.

Building on this departure and its exclusive focus on dignity, Anupama Rao's *The Caste Question* foregrounds the notion of "stigmatized subjects" as a product of the colonial practices of governmentality that was appropriated by the Dalits in western India to claim citizenship and demand exception on "historically specific forms of suffering and exclusion."[28] By forcing the government to produce affirmative action politics, the Dalit politics and the state produced "new forms of vulnerability" to further exacerbate the significance of violence to contemporary Dalit identity. The Dalit politics of emancipation has produced new rituals of violence, especially the gendered violence discussed extensively in part two of the book.

Mark Jurgensmeyer's 1982 study of Chamars of Punjab highlighted the role Dalit actors and their agenda by focusing on the key role of *quam* or religious identity as a potential alternative to secular ones.[29] The first study of its kind to draw attention to Ad-Dharm movement from its inception in 1926 to its decline in the 1930s was based on extensive interviews with Mangoo Ram, the founder of the movement and his writings. By focusing on the attraction and appeal of other religious visions as potential alternatives to Hinduism, the book outlined the capacity of Dalit actors to imagine possibilities of religious change through a community struggle. However, we don't find any evidence about the depth and spread of the Mangoo Ram's movement.

In contrast, the Satnam sect was roughly fifty percent of the Chamar community and constituted a fifth of the total population in the Chhattisgarh region of Central India.[30] The Satnamis of Chhatisgarh had attracted increasing attention because of their unique accomplishment in questioning Brahmanical order, and Saurabh Dube's study utilized the ethno-historical methodology to outline a century of protest (1850-1950)—comparable to the protests in the western region of India. Dube's study was unique in telling us about the agrarian location of Chamar society in the region and documenting their initiative in extending agriculture. The Satnam sect rejected Hinduism but the rituals and values reinforced the ideas of purity and pollution. The notable aspect of Dube's study was to document a rich history of Satnamis in creating a new political and cultural history of dignity. Sekhar Bandyopadyay rich history of Namasudras—the second largest caste in Bengal and the largest in eastern Bengal—was based on a rich collection of Dalit Bangla language sources.[31] The Namasudras' writings in the late-nineteenth century drew from Hindu *shastric* traditions to claim a pure and clean status, rejecting the Chandala term, and substantially drawing from the Puranic sources to acquire ideological and historical legitimacy. The Bengali Dalit movement relied substantially on the British government, not on the nationalists, to achieve political and educational aims for their community in the early part of the twentieth century. However, by the 1940s the Namasudras' organizations and groups who had thus far maintained a separate identity were attracted to the politics of nationalism and communism. As these two studies validate, most Dalit movements sought to acquire claims for dignity through a variety of strategies as early as the 1880s.

The desire to recover an alternative cultural memory has acquired a robust momentum in the Tamil and Telugu regions, where the Dalit activists and scholars have also sought to interrogate Dravidian and Communist legacy. This has also involved discovering Dalit leaders in late colonial India, like Bhagya Reddy Verma in Telugu country and Iyothee Thass in Tamil country.[32] Particularly salient in this respect is G. Aloysius' 1998 study which draws our attention to Iyothee Thass and his organizational efforts between 1890 and 1914 (before Ambedkar) to initiate the anti-caste struggles and to claim and propagate that Buddhism is the original religion of Tamil Dalits.[33]

Dalit feminist scholars and activists have interrogated the mainstream writings for its stereotypical representations of liberated Dalit women who have dignity and equality. The mainstream Indian feminist accounts, strengthened by Kancha Ilaiah's particular narrative, have contrasted the liberated Dalit women, despite their low economic position, with the caste Hindu women who are viewed as domesticated socially and economically.[34] Urmila Pawar and Gopal Guru have reminded us that the Dalit women "speak differently" in order to distinguish them from mainstream Indian feminism dominated by middle class and caste Hindu women.[35] In addition, they have urged an investigation into the Dalit patriarchy and the representation of liberated Dalit women in mainstream historiography. As Urmila Pawar has argued, the Dalit women had to deal with the "caste based atrocities…the threat of rape, [and] in the family she had to tolerate the physical violence and other atrocities of men."[36] Indeed, Dalit feminist writers have recovered their own history of the Dalit movement. According to a 2008 book *We also Made History*, which was largely based on the interviews of women participants, the Dalit women's unique role was documented as participating and strengthening the Ambedkarite movement in the 1940s and providing it with an unusual social depth in the Vidharba region of western India.[37]

The Spatial Modality

Vasant Moon and Mohan Namishray emphasize the everyday experience of growing up untouchable in their *jati mohalla* in Nagpur and Meerut. Particularly striking is Namishray's detailed description of the *jati mohallas* of his ancestral village to emphasize their role in imprisoning people's consciousness to caste practices of discrimination and domination. In almost all cases the Dalit villages are outside the boundary of the main caste Hindu villages. The latter are also divided in different *jati mohallas*, and it is this spatial location that complements *varna* ideology and provides a real meaning to it the colonial census. Yet, it also gives Dalit villages with their specific *jati* names like *chamrauli*, *chamrauti*, *pasiana* in North India, *maharpuras* or *maharwadas* in Maharashtra, and *ceris'* in Tamil Nadu a spatial and ideological location. The everyday experience of the untouchability that all activists and writers invoke in their memoirs also shapes their activism. D. R. Nagaraj regards "everyday life of the Dalits" as the "second criterion" that has "given birth to the Dalit" in modern India.[38] A crucial aspect of this experience is in the villages where "the hegemonic village elites" refuses to acknowledge Dalit entitlements and ownership "over resources—say land and water."[39] Nagaraj, Moon, Namishray, and scores of other Dalit writers and activists have invoked the social experience in the *jati mohallas* as a key feature of the Dalit movement. By historicizing the social experience of Dalit actors and activism in their localities will help us foreground the role of spatial modality in constituting *jati* consciousness. Attention to *jati mohallas* located in a district or a region has the potential to raise more profound questions about the history of *jati* (caste) in the making of modern India.

Ethnographic and historical fieldwork must enter into conversations with the 1880s district settlement reports in order to historicize *jati mohallas* or a defined regional entity, which might be crucial to writing new caste and Dalit histories. To expand on Cohn's framework, the caste and tribe surveys and census reports put out a *varna* representation of India, whereas the settlement reports and contemporary field work draw attention to *jatis* and kingships.[40] The settlement officers located in the districts were the first writers who wrote in the 1880s detailed local histories of rent, revenue, social and economic life of different *jatis* spatially construed. Because the district settlement reports were spatially constituted (and motivated) to tabulate different *jatis* relationship to the production of agrarian and non-agrarian wealth, the writers noted radical new relationships of Dalit *jatis* to occupation that they were previously unaware. Many writers expressed their complete and total surprise at finding untouchable castes like Chamars and Pasis as cultivators. The note by J. Hooper, the Basti district commissioner and author of the 1891 settlement report, illustrates the sentiment that, "many of the Chamars are genuine cultivators, that is to say, they earn their subsistence entirely by farming on their own account."[41] As district commissioner and writer of the report, Neale asserted his specific spatial knowledge of the Etawah district, "but, speaking from my knowledge of the district" referred to statistical data collected during the settlement which demonstrated that Chamars are primarily cultivators.[42] District settlement reports, *tehsil* assessment reports, and land tenure inquiries are the new promising sources of writing Dalit history precisely because they are attentive to the spatial locations and characters of different *jatis*.[43] Let me demonstrate their potential in reinterpreting histories of caste, untouchability, and North Indian peasantry.

The Awadh Kisan Sabha movement in North India is generally associated with the shudra peasant groups, the Kurmis, Yadavs, and Muraos.[44] Our association of peasantry with the shudra *jatis* and the landless labor with Dalits is part of from our received sociological understanding of *varna* status and caste in modern India. This perception has also been shaped by the formulations in the census and caste and tribe series. The police reports, the Kisan Sabha

papers, and the Kisan Sabha leader Baba Ramachandra's papers, provide detailed accounts of the role of different social groups. They mention the role of Shudra peasant groups, but they also mention the participation by the Dalit Kisan groups. It is only when we look at settlement reports of Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh, several other rent and revenue reports, and land tenure inquiries of the region that we begin to understand radical role of Pasis and Chamars in the peasant movement because they felt threatened by *bedekahli* (eviction) from their *Kissani kaam* (peasant occupation).[45] The village studies conducted by the Lucknow school of sociologists the Awadh region of Uttar Pradesh and supervised by RadhaKamal Mukherjee in the 1920s and 1930s, provide a solid analysis of the spatial *jati* configurations, and their role in rent and revenue, local politics, and issues of domination and subordination.[46] The spatial recognition of the Dalit *jatis'* in local reports of knowledge production provides us with a distinct framework to reconsider regional and national histories of India. In the history of modern India spatial modality requires urgent attention to understand the everyday production and consumption of caste and untouchability that continues to shape political and cultural lives.

Conclusion

Occupation and dignity are the prominent conceptual modes through which the history and practice of caste and untouchability in modern India have been understood. Dalit autobiographical sources draw attention to the experience of growing up untouchable in their *jati mohallas.* It is important for us to recognize these efforts as an important and methodologically productive way of writing histories of untouchability (and of caste more generally), by suggesting that we need to engage with sources in ways that recognize access to, restriction from, and experiences of specific kinds of spaces. In a recent article, Gopal Guru has urged us to pay attention to "the role of space" because "space determines the emergence and the efficacy of thought" for both Ambedkar and Gandhi.[47] All of this points to our need to further build upon the attention that has been devoted to occupation and dignity by developing close engagements with historical and contemporary that pay closer attention to the role of space.

Endnotes

[1] Vasant Moon, *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* (New York: Rowman &Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 175 . First published in Marathi as *Vasti*, 1995. Translated by Gail Omvedt.
[2] Mohan Dass Namishray, *Apne-Apne Pinjare: Ek Dalit ki Atamakatha* (*Prisoners of Oneself: Autobiography of a Dalit*) (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2006 [1995]), p.17. (My translation).
[3] A point that both Gopal Guru and D. R. Nagaraj have emphasized. Gopal Guru, 'Introduction: Theorizing Humiliation,' and 'Rejection of Rejection: Foregrounding Self-Respect,' in Guru ed. *Humiliation: Claims and Context*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009). D. R. Nagaraj, 'Self-Purification vs Self-Respect: On the Roots of the Dalit Movement,' in D.R. Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet and Other Essays: The Dalit Movement in India*, edited by Prithvi Shobhi (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011).
[4] http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-common/press_2011archive.html (accessed on January 11, 2013)
[5] K. Satyanarayana, 'Will India Become a Caste Society if Caste is Counted,' in *Indian in Transition* series, Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI), University of Pennsylvania, 2010 (web access, 11-10-2010).
[6] Chapter 7, 'Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture,' and chapter 10, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,' in Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).
[7] See chapters on caste in the Uttar Pradesh census reports for 1901 and 1911. *Report, North-West Provinces and Oudh, vol. 16, pt I for 1901* (Allahabad: Superintendent of Government Press, 1902). *Report, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol. 16, pt. 1, 1911,* (Allahabad: Superintendent of Government Press, 1912).
[8] George W. Briggs, *The Chamars* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1920), 261-262.
[9] See chapter one of the following reports; H. G. Walton, *A Monograph on Tanning and Working in Leather in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Allahabad: Superintendent of Government Press, United Provinces, 1903). Chandra, Rowland N. L. *Tanning, and Working Leather in the Province of Bengal* (Calcutta: Secretariat Press, 1904).
[10] Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1999]), 225-229.
[11] Robert Deliege, *The Untouchables of India* (New York: Berg, 1999), 27.
[12] Edgar Thurston & K.R. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. Nine Volumes (Madras: Government Press, 1909), vol. IV, Madigas, 292-325 and Malas, 329-387, and vol. VI, Paraiyan or Pariahs, 77-140. William Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh.* Four Volumes (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1896), vol.II, Chamars, 168-194, vol. IV, Pasis, 138-152.
[13] Deliege, The Untouchables of India, pp. 5-6, in general the introduction seeks capture the numbers' paradox.
[14] Kathleen Gough, 'Brahman Kinship in a Tamil Village,' *American Anthropologist*, New series, vol. 58, no. 5, 846-847.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Gerald Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1963) 221.
[17] Joan Mencher, 'The Caste System Upside Down, or The Not-So-Mysterious East,' in *Current Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 4, 476.
[18] Mencher, 'The Caste System Upside Down,' 476.
[19] Michael Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community of South India: Structure and Consensus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), see chapter three.
[20] Robert Deliége, *The World of the Untouchables: Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5. Translated by David Phillips. First published in French, 1988.
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[29] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in Twentieth-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), specially the first three parts of the book.
[30] Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 50-52 and Appendix 2.
[31] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947,* (London: Curzon, 1997) specially the introduction and chapter one.
[32] G. Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement amon the Tamils under Colonialism* (New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 1998), especially chapters 3 and 4 on Pandit Iyothee Thass. Also, Ravikumar, 'Re-reading Periyar.' *Seminar* vol. 30, no. 558, February 2006.
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[39] Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet and Other Essays*, 108.
[40] Cohn, 'Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture,' 167, in *An Anthropolgist among the Historians and Other Essays*.
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